

Remembering No-Name Storm's Devastation of Duxbury Beach

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN

It hit 9 years ago with a force that leveled Duxbury beach and a fury that the beach hadn't seen since 1898.

The No-Name storm of October 1991. The Halloween Storm. The Perfect Storm, as author Sebastian Junger called it in his book (and movie) of the same name.

"It took a beautiful natural resource and flattened it as flat as a pancake," said Harbormaster Don Beers at a meeting last week of the Duxbury Beach Preservation Society at Battelle Institute. The Preservation Society is the fundraising part of the Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc., which owns the beach and leases it annually to the town.

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It was a large turnout at Battelle for the Perfect Storm Remembered.

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"It was the most destructive storm that ever hit Duxbury beach in our lifetime," said Al Krahmer of the Reservation. He was operations manager of the beach in 1991 during that storm.

The Perfect Storm caused millions of dollars in damage to the beach but did not take any lives in Duxbury. It obliterated dunes, tore up fencing and erased the access road. The ocean washed over the entire 6-mile long beach and eroded 25-30 ft dunes at Plum Hill. Only High Pines was able to withstand the ocean's wrath, and just barely at that. In one area, the beach breached and a large hole developed letting the sea meet the bay. The beach was devastated.

Krahmer, Beers and others shared their remembrances of the storm that changed the face of Duxbury beach forever.

"I'll never forget the week before because it was so calm. It was next to perfect," Beers reflected. "This storm was rather unique. It blew northeast for days before it hit. We were down on the beach days before watching the building seas."

Beers was keeping watch on Hurricane Grace coming up from the south, but it was when that storm combined with a Canadian cold front and a large low pressure system moving east, that the simmering tempest boiled over.

Beers told the story of a man who decided to sail from Maine in a 25 ft. boat as the storm built. The sailor warned the Coast Guard as he proceeded down the coast, and then the Coast Guard would notify local harbormasters' offices of the man's location.

It was low tide when the sailor reached Duxbury, and as Beers watched him, he started to sail inside High Pines ledge: "I remember how terrorized I was. I knew he wouldn't make it," said Beers. "The first wave hit him and knocked him down, but he came up again."

The man was severely injured and had to be taken by helicopter from the bay. "That was the beginning of the Halloween storm for me," Beers said.

His department prepared for the storm as best they could; they pulled boats and floats from the bay, but there was nothing they could do for the beach.

"Really what you do for the beach is hold on and pray," Beers said.

When the storm cleared, Beers drove over the bridge to assess the damage. As he neared the beach end, he saw



L-R: Lobsterman Bill Bennett, Harbormaster Don Beers, Al Krahmer and Al Vautrinot from Duxbury Beach Reservation, Inc.

something he'd never seen before — half of the bridge was covered with sand. Not only was sand from the outer beach covering the bridge, it had completely buried the parking lot.

"We knew we were in trouble, no doubt about it," Beers said.

The worst storm to hit Duxbury beach since 1898 caused over \$1.167 million in damage, said Krahmer. "We lost 30 to 40 ft of dune structure in one fell swoop," he said. "Sixty percent of the road was washed out. We had to replace 10 miles of snow fencing. Three and a half miles of post and cable fencing was lost. It destroyed 60-70 percent of the asphalt" at the pavilion parking lot. The lunch room at the pavilion was completely gone and had to be rebuilt.

"It was a major project," Krahmer said of the beach restoration.

The first and most important thing that had to be done was to fix the breach. "We got the bulldozer down there and plugged up the hole so it didn't get bigger," said Krahmer.

Over 400,000 cubic feet of sand had to be moved from the parking lot, the road and the marsh and put back on the beach. Krahmer credits the fast action of the state Coastal Zone Management department with helping to save the beach. They

supplied 20 bulldozers in two days.

To pay for the beach restoration, the Reservation used the \$75,000 reserve it had built up since the Blizzard of 1978. It also used \$105,000 in budget money and \$12,000 in private donations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency gave \$700,000. The Reservation also took out loans from FEMA.

The No-Name storm was followed by another storm 6 months later that wiped out a sacrificial dune built with FEMA money. Since the Reservation cannot always count on government money, it started to fund raise using the Preservation Society to rebuild its reserves for future storm damage repairs. The purpose of the meeting last week was to raise awareness of the fragility of Duxbury beach and the need to prepare for the next devastating storm.

Over a hundred years ago, the beach was owned by the Wright family who sought to develop it into 200 house lots. However, a massive storm in 1898 changed their minds. In 1918, when Mrs. Wright died, 15 to 20 families bought the beach to conserve it and ran it privately as the Duxbury Beach Association until 1975, when the Duxbury Beach Reservation Inc. was formed.

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